LABOR SAVING MACHINES MAKE MORE JOBS —SAYS KINTNER

The effect of labor saving machinery upon employment and social and economic conditions is a much discussed topic at present. Will new industries absorb this unemployment due to labor-saving machinery? Mr. S. M. Kintner, Vice-President of the Westinghouse Electric and Manufacturing Company, discussed this question in an address delivered recently in Pittsburgh. The address is printed below.

UNEMPLOYMENT is a matter of world-wide concern, and it is only fair that some thought be given to the part played by technical progress and its production of labor-saving machinery, in creating such a condition.

As one walks through great factories, or studies the processes of modern industry, they cannot fail to be impressed by the great amount of labor-saving machinery and, consequently, the large output of product per unit of labor employed. However, it is not safe to draw conclusions from that observation alone. Some of these vast industries have been created from nothing, in so far as their effect on labor is concerned.

This is apparent when, for example, we think of the millions employed today in the automobile industry—in the making, the selling and servicing of the large number of such mechanisms, whereas fifty years ago there were none.

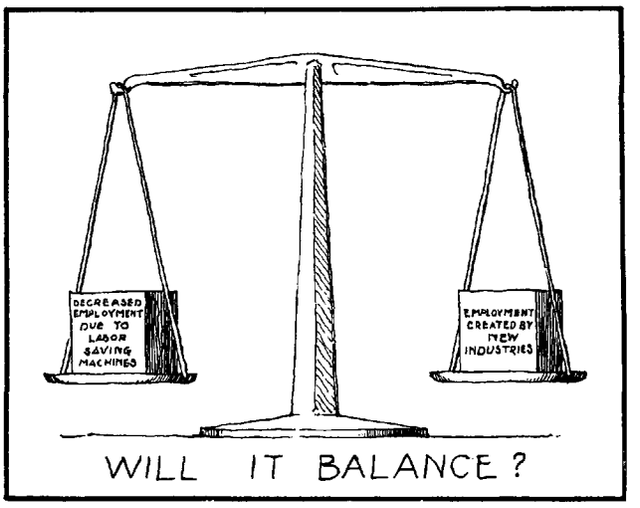
The same lesson can be learned from studies of the electrical industry, of which there was none one hundred years ago; of the radio; of the telephone and telegraph; of the motion pictures and a number of other industries created as it were from nothing, but now employing millions.

The general use of power, developed by waterfalls or steam and distributed by means of electricity, and of power produced by the mobile internal combustion engine, in contrast to one hundred years ago when the efforts of beasts of burden and those of human beings were the principal sources of power, has completely changed our methods of living. The effects of this general use of power have revolutionized the construction of our cities—a change that has taken place within the memory of many of those now listening to my voice.

Out at Hoover Dam is being done a job larger than the Egyptian pyramids. It is being done in a few years, instead of in several lifetimes—by electric shovels and cableways and other machinery, instead of by an army of straining slaves, bleeding under the lash. The equivalent of the machinery on that construction job, in terms of human labor, would run into figures that would be like the census, and yet machinery has not robbed that vast imaginary multitude of work; for with hand labor the enterprise could not have been thought of and, even as it is, there is a very respectable city of workers on the spot.

Technical progress is still hard at work, creating good new jobs by the million for tomorrow, not only in new lines, but in old ones. When hard times struck three years ago, billions of dollars worth of machinery in plants all over the country was carefully put away, until it should be needed. When its owners take it out again to use, they will find much of it as useless as if they had let it rust—technical progress since 1929 has made it as out of date as a three-year-old suit of clothes found in an old trunk. Even in three years, new machinery has been made so much faster, lighter, safer, more efficient, that it will not pay to use the old. And the re-equipping of the country with modern machinery will alone go far to make prosperity.

Still greater possibilities lie in the now undreamed of arts, businesses and industries that this fairy of technical progress will almost certainly produce from her magic



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Labor Saving Machines

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box. Fifty years ago, men found they could use electricity for light. Forty years ago it was lighting streets everywhere. Thirty years ago, it was driving factories, and producing new materials. It is only twelve years since it began to be a voice to reach the universal ear, and it seems only yesterday that it became the universal amusement, the sole actor in ten thousand theaters.

Why should we suppose that its possibilities are exhausted? Is it not reasonable to expect that new industries, each demanding an army of workers, will appear from the source whence so many have already miraculously appeared?

So many prophecies of the past that have sounded a warning of a finished world, have proven so foolish when viewed in the light of subsequent events, that it must take a brave, and I might add, foolish man to record his opinion to that effect as a result of our present troubles.

Imagine what the present-day farmer must think of Malthus' warning at the beginning of the 19th Century, that unless the rate of growth of the population was controlled, humanity would starve—as they would not be able to raise sufficient food to sustain themselves.

Malthus lived long enough to see the start of the machine age, but short of a time when he could realize that it had completely nullified the conditions that aroused his fears.

No doubt the tendency of the age towards shorter and shorter working time will continue. Furthermore, it is highly probable that as we work more into this new order of things, workers will enter active work at a later period than now, and similarly retire at an earlier period in their lives. Such a plan will be necessary if the worker is to have an opportunity to enjoy the many new devices that are to find their way into existence as well as assist in the better distribution of jobs.

Many of us have witnessed the change in working hours, first from sun-up to sun-down in the earliest days of this generation, to a twelve-hour day, then a ten-hour day; to be followed by an eight-hour day—now we are likely approaching a six-hour day, and the present change is much greater than the preceding ones and, consequently, more difficult to adjust.

Who would want to retrace our steps and throw away all our labor-saving machines, in order that we might have more jobs? Surely no one who gives the question serious thought. What is needed is a new plan of operation that will give due consideration to our new order of things and permit us to enjoy this millenium of freedom from drudgery and leisure for thought and pleasure—the end towards which we have all striven for so long.

Such a plan to be successful must still hold out rewards for the ones who do the best in still further improving conditions. The incentive to do better must still be preserved.